# **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Smarter Balanced Weekly Update**

Issue 52

Week ending Friday, February 17, 2012

# **Top News This Week**

- Smarter Balanced in the news
- Item Specifications showcase announced
- New external website launched

The Smarter Balanced Weekly Update is an email sent each Friday to keep Consortium members and collaborators informed of new developments and upcoming events. The Update is widely distributed to Consortium state leads, work group members, Consortium and WestEd staff, and Consortium advisors, partners, and service providers. State members should feel free to share information in the Update with those who are interested in the Consortium's work.

Please note that embedded links in the Update sometimes direct readers to the Consortium's internal website, available only to Consortium members. If you are a state employee in a Consortium state and need access to material on this website, please contact <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a>.

### From the Executive Director

Greetings. Next week, we will meet with chief state school officers for a day-long session in Denver. In addition to our monthly conference calls, these in-person meetings provide an opportunity to get feedback and guidance on key policy and design decisions for the assessment system. The meeting will include an update on progress to date and a discussion of issues like optimal test length, implementation of the Common Core, and strategic communications.

I hope everyone had an opportunity this week to visit the new Smarter Balanced website: <a href="https://www.smarterbalanced.org">www.smarterbalanced.org</a>. We will continue to add new information and resources as we move forward. Our goal is to increase awareness and transparency about the work of the Consortium and provide new avenues for engagement with stakeholders.

Along with the website, we have a new look and a new logo for the Consortium. While these decisions can sometimes seem subjective, a lot of consideration went into creating a clean, forward-looking design. We worked closely with an ad hoc committee of Consortium members to solicit feedback throughout the process. The logo colors and type are meant to convey the innovative, dynamic nature of our work, and the triangles symbolize the balance of the assessment components—formative, interim, and summative.

One of the other changes is a more consistent presentation of our name: Smarter Balanced. Too often, names get shortened to acronyms that explain little about the purpose or mission of the organization. That makes it more challenging for those who aren't closely involved in a project to understand what it means or why it matters.

Our name is intentional. Building on the experience of member states, we are working to create assessments that are smarter than what has come before—and that provide a balanced set of measures of student achievement and growth to improve teaching and learning. Those are the goals that brought this Consortium together, and these new tools will help us to better tell our story.

Enjoy the weekend and the Presidents Day holiday on Monday. JW

#### **Announcements**

Smarter Balanced in the news—Two recent articles highlighted the work of Smarter Balanced. Governing magazine interviewed Joe Willhoft and Carissa Miller about the development of next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core: <a href="http://www.governing.com/blogs/view/two-paths-toward-common-core-standards-assessments.html">http://www.governing.com/blogs/view/two-paths-toward-common-core-standards-assessments.html</a>. Linda Darling-Hammond published an op-ed in the Sacramento Bee about the benefits of Smarter Balanced assessments for California, noting that the

assessments will "include more written responses from students, plus tasks that require them to engage in research, solve more complex problems and use technology." http://www.sacbee.com/2012/02/14/4261504/for-california-schools-we-need.html

Item Specifications showcase—The third and final showcase for item specifications will occur on February 28, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (Pacific), with a review period to conclude March 16. Final documents (or parts of documents) will be shared along with a response to feedback. This is an opportunity for member states and the public to provide final feedback on what will be the cornerstone documents to item/task development for the Consortium. Feedback from across the Consortium is essential for the final documents to reflect the concerns and desires of the Consortium. Please review separate emails for meeting details.

New external website—This week, Smarter Balanced launched a new external website at <a href="https://www.smarterbalanced.org">www.smarterbalanced.org</a>. The site will help showcase the innovative work of the Consortium and provide more frequent updates on activities, milestones, and events. Visitors are able to explore an interactive timeline of activities by school year, download new fact sheets and resources, and sign up for a monthly e-newsletter. In addition, new templates and materials are now available on the collaboration site.

## **Upcoming Events**

Chiefs In-Person meeting—Chiefs and state leads: The next in-person meeting of the member state Chiefs will occur on Friday, February 24, in Denver. Please see separate emails from <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a> regarding logistical information.

#### Resources

Year Two, First Quarter Project Report available—The quarterly project report for the period ending December 31, 2011, can be found at <a href="http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pub-n-res/smarter-balanced-quarterly-report-december-2011/">http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pub-n-res/smarter-balanced-quarterly-report-december-2011/</a>. The report details the Consortium's progress in key areas and priorities for the next three months.

The IT architecture and requirements are now available online: <a href="http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/technology/">http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/technology/</a> (refer to section titled "IT Systems Architecture Reports and Resources").

Link to the Technology Readiness Tool webinar recording—The State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) hosted a webinar on January 30 to provide additional information about the IT readiness effort and answer questions. To access a recording of the webinar, please go to: <a href="https://cisco.webex.com/ciscosales/lsr.php?AT=pb&SP=MC&rID=58072087&rKey=2b2bb44ed08bb516">https://cisco.webex.com/ciscosales/lsr.php?AT=pb&SP=MC&rID=58072087&rKey=2b2bb44ed08bb516</a>.

Report on engaging higher education in new assessments available—A new report from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) identifies the conditions that can help build consensus between state K-12 and postsecondary systems. It also makes recommendations for meaningful involvement by higher education in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and assessments, which will inform our efforts to engage the postsecondary field. The report is available at <a href="http://www.nchems.org/pubs/detail.php?id=146">http://www.nchems.org/pubs/detail.php?id=146</a>.

ESEA Flexibility Waiver support—State Chiefs and state leads: A document designed to support Smarter Balanced Consortium states applying for ESEA Flexibility is now available. The document is specifically designed to support a state's answer to question 1.C "Develop and Administer Annual, Statewide, Aligned, High-Quality Assessments that Measure Student Growth" and could be included in its entirety as a complete document or a state could use portions of the document for their application. Please note that the third paragraph of the document must be updated with specific state information, including the state's role in the Consortium. The document is available on the internal Smarter Balanced website at <a href="https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/document-library">https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/document-library</a>, and if you require a copy of your state's signed Memorandum of Understanding, an electronic scan can be sent via email to the Smarter Balanced state lead within 24 hours of receiving the request.

Collaboration Site—Consortium members: The Consortium uses an internal collaboration site hosted by Google Docs to enable information sharing and collaboration among the member states. If you are a state employee in a Consortium state and need access to material on this website, please contact <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a>.

Relevant news items—State members: Weekly selections of news items relevant to the Consortium are available on the internal Smarter Balanced website at <a href="https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/news-archive">https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/news-archive</a>.

Prior versions of the Weekly Update—State members: Previous Smarter Balanced Weekly Updates are available on the internal Smarter Balanced website at <a href="https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/weekly-update-archive.">https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/weekly-update-archive.</a>

Smarter Balanced meeting minutes—State members: Agendas and minutes from previously held meetings are available on the internal Smarter Balanced website at <a href="https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/meetings">https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/meetings</a>.

## **Answering Open Questions**

Each week we will address a question or two on the minds of Consortium members. Send your questions to sbac@wested.org.

Will the Smarter Balanced interim assessments be compatible with existing curriculum and instruction system platforms?

Smarter Balanced is committed to developing an assessment system that uses open-source technology and standard protocols whenever possible to promote compatibility with existing systems. Additional information about the IT systems architecture is available here: <a href="http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Smarter\_IT-Systems">http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Smarter\_IT-Systems SummaryReport 120120.pdf</a>.

However, the Consortium has not yet made a decision regarding how the interim assessments and formative assessment practices will be made available after the system is implemented in the 2014–15 school year. We will work closely with member states as these platforms are developed to ensure that the assessment system meets the needs of schools and educators.

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